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Regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields

Statement submitted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, Category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY PROCESS OF SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Between 1972 and 1991, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) held seven Inter-Parliamentary Conferences on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) as part of a continuing process. That activity had a Mediterranean component; then, in 1990/91, the IPU embarked on a process specific to that region.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY CSCM PROCESS

All the Mediterranean partners. In order that the desired partnership could be established without creating new imbalances, it was agreed from the outset that the Parliaments of all Mediterranean countries should participate in the process.

Main participants: Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malta, Monaco, Morocco, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Turkey, Yugoslavia.

Associate participants:

Russian Federation, United Kingdom, United States of America;

Palestine;

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, Assembly of the Western European Union, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Consultative Council of the Arab Maghreb Union, European Parliament, Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Observers: All other members of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Three "baskets"

1st Basket: Political and Security-Related Cooperation: Regional Stability

2nd Basket: Economic Cooperation: Co-development and Partnership

3rd Basket: Dialogue Among Civilizations and Human Rights

The formula of consensus. The formula of consensus was chosen as the means for decision on all the points under discussion.

A dynamic approach fostering the settlement of conflicts and their prevention. Without disregarding the conflicts then under way, the 1st CSCM recognized that it was not mandated to devise direct solutions to conflicts that had long been under way in the region, in some cases for decades; but its purpose was to launch a pragmatic process of cooperation which would gradually gain in strength

and coverage, generate a positive and irreversible momentum and facilitate the settlement of those conflicts. Subsequently, that approach has constantly been reaffirmed.

An "integrated" approach. All the factors which contribute to security, stability and development in the region are dealt with together in the context of the process.

The spirit of the process. Gradually, confidence as the cement of relations and partnership as the basis for exchanges in all areas have emerged as the real foundations of the process. It has been essential to develop an inter-Mediterranean dialogue based on tolerance, mutual respect, justice and equality.

STAGES AND MECHANISMS OF THE PROCESS OF THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY CSCM

1st CSCM. The Mediterranean project became operational with the holding of the first Inter-Parliamentary Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (1st CSCM) in Malaga from 15 to 20 June 1992, under the chairmanship of the President of the Spanish Congress of Deputies. The Final Document adopted by consensus at the end of this 1st CSCM, which is said to have been a considerable source of inspiration to those who drafted the Declaration and Working Programme of the Euro-Mediterranean Conference (Barcelona, November 1995), confirmed the basic principles of the process and set up the general framework for cooperation between the Mediterranean partners.

Permanent consultation mechanism for the parties to the process. Following the Malaga Conference, the IPU decided to set up a permanent consultation mechanism for the representatives of the parties to the process. Held twice yearly, the consultations serve to maintain and deepen the Mediterranean dialogue at the parliamentary level; they provide the opportunity to review developments concerning the setting up of an intergovernmental mechanism for the CSCM and encourage such action, and assist in the development of both multilateral and bilateral cooperation between the parties concerned. It is in this context that preparations were made for a second CSCM.

The 2nd CSCM and preparatory meetings. To prepare for the 2nd CSCM, three specialized meetings were held: one, on the subjects of the 3rd Basket, took place in July 1994, in Cagliari, Sardinia, at the invitation of the Italian Parliament; the second, relating to the 2nd Basket, was held in Izmir in November 1994 at the invitation of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey; and the third, on the 1st Basket, was held in Alexandria in June 1995 at the invitation of the People's Assembly of Egypt. The 2nd CSCM then took place from 1 to 4 November 1995 in Valletta and was chaired by the Speaker of the Maltese House of Representatives. The Final Document adopted by consensus at the end of the Valletta Conference reaffirms the principles and recommendations formulated at the 1st CSCM and at the same time expands and updates them. It takes up and deals with many delicate questions such as terrorism and corruption or the fundamentals of democracy, and opens new perspectives for Mediterranean cooperation.

The 3rd CSCM and preparatory meetings. Since then, the IPU has taken up an invitation from the Tunisian Parliament to hold the 3rd CSCM in Tunis by 1999 and has decided to hold a series of short thematic preparatory meetings, the first of which will be held in Monaco in May 1997 at the invitation of the Parliament of Monaco and will focus on employment and related issues.

Towards an association of Mediterranean States. The Final Document of the Valletta Conference affirms the need henceforth to provide a solid institutional base for the process of Mediterranean cooperation, both at governmental and parliamentary levels, and thus recommends the creation of an association of Mediterranean States, open to all the Mediterranean coastal countries and to those countries whose destiny is directly linked to that Sea. It indicates that the aim of the association would be to foster relations of confidence between Mediterranean States so as to ensure regional security and stability and to unite their endeavours in a true spirit of partnership with a view to the harmonious development of the different States.

SELECTED RECOMMENDATIONS IN FIELDS OF INTEREST TO THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

The documents adopted by the IPU Conferences and meetings on security and cooperation in the Mediterranean cover the whole range of questions in the three baskets. Some of those of direct interest to the Council are briefly mentioned here:

Democracy and human rights, the key to sustainable development. The 2nd CSCM affirmed that good governance, transparency in administration, the fight against corruption and measures to prevent the flight of public funds and the misappropriation at the source or the receiving end of resources for development aid were key factors in democracy and sustainable social development. It also pointed out that the watch-dog role played by the media made a significant contribution to good governance and called for respect for press freedom and for free access to information in all Mediterranean countries. The 2nd CSCM also advocated the teaching of the principles and basics of democracy and of how national institutions function, as the best way of making sure that democracy takes root in people's minds and that people participate in a conscious and responsible manner in the management of public affairs. And in order to root democracy in Mediterranean institutions, it advocated, among other measures, the strengthening of national mechanisms for controlling public finance.

The Valletta Conference recalled the universal, indivisible and independent nature of human rights. It reaffirmed that human rights and fundamental freedoms were a matter of international concern since respect for them was one of the foundations of international order and therefore declared that respect for the undertakings of any State of the region in that field was a subject of legitimate concern for all the other States.

It also reaffirmed that the concept of democracy would only take on real and dynamic meaning once political orientations and national legislations had been decided upon jointly by men and women taking equitable account of the interests and specific talents of both halves of the population.

Combating terrorism. Denouncing terrorism, which leads to repression and thus launches a vicious circle, the IPU made a point of stating firmly that, however legitimate it may be, no struggle can justify indiscriminate attacks. It also stressed the vital need for anti-terrorism security measures to be backed by structural measures designed to further economic and social development and strengthen representative democracy and by the extension of democracy and the consolidation of human rights.

A contract for economic and social solidarity based on the well-appreciated interest of the various partners. Disparities in economic, commercial, demographic, social and technological areas threaten to make the Mediterranean a fault line between the north and the south. Accordingly, while stressing the positive nature of the building of Europe, the 2nd CSCM pointed out that the construction and stability of a united Europe could be impaired without a forward-looking vision of relations with the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries and adequate development in those countries. Europe would be weakened if, by applying policies inspired by reflexes based on fear or the temptation to dominate, it were to "close itself off" to the South and let the countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean become mired in poverty, political instability and economic stagnation. The Conference added that the European countries were well aware that it was in their interest to support democratization projects that would encourage the peoples of the southern and eastern Mediterranean to remain in their countries, thus heading off a worsening of population flows towards the north where, in the context of increasing unemployment, those flows were awakening xenophobia and withdrawal as well as racist violence.

Development of an intra-Mediterranean economic space. One of the main measures advocated by the 2nd CSCM was the establishment of an economic and financial partnership which, taking into account the different degrees of development, would be based (among other things) on the progressive establishment of a free trade area.

Human resources and population movements. With the aim of reducing the number of migrant workers and promoting the sustainable development of the countries concerned, the 2nd CSCM advocated the setting up and further improvement of educational and vocational training programmes for young people and adults in countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean, encouraged the countries on the northern side to support those programmes by means of a financial contribution or technical assistance, and emphasized that one way of preventing the brain-drain from the south to the north was the implementation of large-scale development projects in the south.

Management of water resources. The 2nd CSCM noted that proper water management was one of the fundamental factors of sustainable development and also contributed to the maintenance of good relations between Mediterranean countries and called on Mediterranean countries to move towards regular evaluations of those resources and to manage them from a long-term perspective. Noting additionally that population growth and accelerated urban development in certain southern countries would leave them vulnerable sooner or later to the depletion of their conventional water resources, it advocated the allocation of funds designed to ensure the further refinement of technologies for the use of

alternative resources such as fossil tables, desalinated sea-water and brine water, and for the processing of liquid waste.